

## Pet peeves

Birds of a feather flock together, and a family full of animal lovers can easlity turn a house into a zoo

**M**y life of late has been going to the dogs. And the birds, and the frogs. It's those kids again.

There's this whole Technicolor image that we, the hapless parents, feel we have to create. Some parents think, "Co-op loft in the city with Pampers and take-out." Others think, "Vegan-utopian commune in the country complete with crèche."

The image is a conglomeration gleaned from television, movies, memories,

had to belly up to the bar and find a substitute.

Our daughter, meanwhile, doesn't have any pets of her own and was making me feel guilty with her innocent glances of unselfish interest in her brother's quest. She happily checked out iguanas, waited patiently during the specifics regarding bearded dragons, and enthused over the coloration of the leopard gecko he eventually acquired.

She also swooned over the rats three aisles down, which was a problem. Though the wife

I KID YOU NOT



**BY BEREN DEMGIER** books—those things that fantasies are made of and the American Dream feeds hungrily upon. Picket fences, cotton sheets drying in the sun, cookies in the oven and the family dog bounding out to meet you as you come up the walk. It's that dog most of all that parents tend to glom onto.

My wife, mind you, could happily do without the mess, the noise, the fuss and the tremendous expense. She is not an animal person. I find this unnatural but forgive her because she is my one true love. Besides, when she so eloquently persuaded me to get into the baby making business, she had to know there were animals on the way as well. (And how!)

During a recent self-imposed Internet exile to study the state of gender in society, I kept straying to the pet Web pages. I found myself at Internet sites featuring lizards rather than lesbians and cockatiels rather than cross-dressers. When I should have been reading Leslie Feinberg, I was reading about bulk loading crickets.

This whole new pet deal came about because our son's rabbit passed away. There was a void to be filled. The dog, the newt, the two frogs, my two canaries and the finches were simply not enough.

In a mad moment I promised a garter snake—despite my native dislike for pets that devour other live animals. I thought this would encourage his budding urge toward herpetology and besides, I have fond memories of wandering around barefoot with snakes wrapped around me, scaring the pants off people.

I told him I'd check it out, only to discover that there are dozens of Web sites devoted to the care and feeding of garter snakes (and their reptilian brethren), and that maintaining them involves copious amounts of earth worms and fresh, struggling fish. Bag that idea. But having promised a cold-blooded creature, I

and I agreed that it's certainly her turn in the pet department, there is no way we'd get anything rodent. My wife is majorly phobic.

These are the times when I feel that those three years of hard labor at the pet store were part of a bigger picture. Little did I know when I was sucking down those Tabs, cleaning cages at sunup straight from a night of partying, earning a few bucks for my ticket out of Dodge, really I was apprenticing for my life career as a mom—married to a woman who couldn't pick up doggie do to save her life. Luckily I've always been an animal person, or else I'd never have been able to deal with all those budgies flying through my hair.

Our children are also animal people. Our son is a scientific animal person. He's way into the food chain concept. He loves animals, preferably wild animals. He wants to study them, he wants to own them, he wants to create new species. Sometimes he scares me.

Our daughter, in the stereotypical gender split, is also an animal lover, but a sentimental one. She can relate to geckos as well as the next guy, but instead of being amazed by its array of spots, she's more likely to tell you its innermost thoughts. She's the kind of girl who talks to dogs. At length. So we knew she was ready for a pet of her own.

Which took me back to the Internet. July and half of August seem a blur of breeders, animal FAQ's and care instructions. And the sound of dollars disappearing faster than my wife can earn them. And I have to hand it to her. Despite her inherent desire to live animal-free, she has made nary a murmur about expense. She loves our kids. She's mustered up enthusiasm for the gecko and its naturalistic environment, and she's growing genuinely fond of the cockatiel our daughter ended up with. She's actually been heard to say, "I love that dog."

Just don't ask her to pick up the poop.

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